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LOUIS CHETLAIN.

THE RED RIVER COLONY.

THE exhaustion of material forces by the Napoleonic wars, which at their close at Waterloo had enfeebled almost to the last gasp all the powers that had been engaged in them, had effects equally powerful upon the social conditions of Europe. In this last phase, indeed, the most deplorable results are seen. The populations which had been reduced by losses in battle and by disease were disheartened, disorganized, impoverished. Successful business enterprises, public and private, which alone can restore confidence and happiness in such a conjuncture, were impossible and unattempted. Manufacturing industries at first languished, then ceased to exist. To crown all these miseries, the untimely and excessive rains in the summer of 1816 had so damaged the crops that a general famine was apprehended. The expense and difficulty of transportation enhanced the cost of all necessaries of life. The price of grain rose to an unprecedented height, and the poorer classes suffered for the want of bread. In Switzerland the distress was greater than in any other part of Central Europe, and the people, wearied of struggles which resulted in their own impoverishment, listened eagerly to the story of a peaceful and more prosperous country beyond the sea.

A few years earlier Thomas Dundas, Earl of Selkirk, a distinguished Scotch nobleman of great wealth, had purchased from the Hudson Bay Company a large tract of land in British America, extending from

the Lake of the Woods and the Winnipeg River westward for nearly 200 miles, and from Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba to the United States boundary, part of which tract is now embraced in the province of Manitoba, and in which are the fertile lands bordering on the Red and Assiniboine rivers. It formed a part of "Rupert Land," named in honor of Prince Rupert, or Robert, of Bavaria, a cousin of King Charles II. of England, and one of the founders and chief managers of the Hudson Bay Company. Rupert Land was somewhat indefinite in extent, embracing all that portion of British America that poured its waters into Hudson Bay, and was drained chiefly by the Great Whale, Rupert, Abbitibbe, Albany, Severn, Winnipeg, Red, Assiniboine, Saskatchewan, and Churchill rivers. In extent it was almost equal to the United States prior to its accessions after the close of the Mexican war. It was the original purpose of Lord Selkirk to settle these lands with colonists from Scotland. In the year 1811 he had succeeded in planting a large colony of Presbyterians from the north of Scotland on the Red River, near its junction with the Assiniboine. This was followed, four years later, by another but smaller colony from the same section of Scotland. In consequence of the stubborn competition and the bitter dissensions between the Hudson Bay Company and the Northwest Company of Montreal, these colonists were compelled to abandon their new homes, nearly all of them removing to Lower Canada, where they believed they could live in greater peace and security.

Lord Selkirk entertained great admiration for the character of the Swiss, and having failed in his emigration schemes with his own countrymen, turned his attention to Switzerland. He prepared and caused to be published in the French and German languages a pamphlet giving a full but somewhat exaggerated description of the new country, its climate, soil, and productions, and offered to all heads of families, or those who were unmarried and over twenty-one years of age, land free of cost, with seeds, cattle, and farming implements, all on a credit of three years. It was the policy of the British government to favor these emigration schemes, the statesmen of that day believing that the region in question could successfully be colonized and settled by way of the north route, viz., Hudson Bay, Nelson River, and Lake Winnipeg. The pamphlet alluded to was freely distributed by Lord Selkirk's agents in the French-speaking cantons of Neuchâtel, Vaud, and Geneva, and in the German-speaking canton of Berne. Many young and middle-aged men in those cantons, having become weary of the condition of affairs at home, decided to emigrate to British America under the auspices of Lord Selkirk, and formed a colony for that purpose. It was agreed to set out for America in the spring of 1821. The colony numbered over 200 persons, nearly three-fourths of whom were of French origin and speaking that language. They were Protestants in faith, and belonged to the Reformed Lutheran Church. Some of the families were descendants of the Huguenots of Eastern France; all were healthy, robust, and well fitted for the labor and privations incident to a life in a new country; most of them were liberally educated and possessed of considerable means. Among the more prominent heads of families were Monier and Rindesbacher (the seniors of the colony in age,

MAP OF HUDSON BAY AND THE TERRITORY WESTWARD.

PHILIP SCHIRMER.

and men of culture and of influence in their respective localities), Dr. Ostertag, Chetlain, and Descombes; and of the unmarried, Schirmer (afterward for a score of years the leading jeweller at Galena, Illinois), Quinche, and Langet. In the families there were, as it happened, but few children under twelve years of age, except infants in arms.

In the month of May, 1821, the preliminaries having been completed, the colonists assembled at a small village on the Rhine near Basle. Why they did not rendezvous at Basle—a city of considerable commercial importance—seems a little strange. The impression afterward prevailed among the colonists that the managers feared to take them to a large city, lest some unfavorable facts connected with the country to which they were going might come to light, especially the important circumstance that Lord Selkirk had failed to settle the country with his own countrymen. Be this as it may, two large flat-boats or barges were provided for their use at the rendezvous, and in these they floated down the Rhine, with its numerous cities and villages and its vine-clad hills and ruined castles on either hand. But with hearts elate with hope and their imaginations filled with visions of a distant land, it may be doubted if the storied scenes of that beautiful river received from these hardy adventurers more than a passing thought. At the end of ten days they reached a small village near Rotterdam, where a stanch ship, the *Lord Wellington*, was in readiness to take them to the New World.

After setting sail their course lay north of Great Britain and just south of Greenland to Hudson Strait. Soon after their departure from Holland it was found that the quality of the food issued was greatly inferior to that promised them before their departure from Switzerland, and complaint was made to the captain of the ship—a stern but kind-hearted old seaman, who acknowledged the wrong, but claimed that he was not responsible for it, which was no doubt true. The water also was bad, and issued in insufficient quantities. Arriving at Hudson Strait, latitude 62° north, the *Lord Wellington* overtook two English ships bound for Fort York, or York Factory, situated at the mouth of the Nelson River, laden with Indian goods and supplies for the garrisons at Forts York and Douglas, and for the employés of the Hudson Bay Company. The strait was filled with floes and bergs of ice, and the ships were thereby detained over three weeks. One of the supply ships was seriously damaged and nearly lost by collision with an iceberg. Finally, with much difficulty and no little peril, Hudson Bay was entered, and after a long and tedious voyage of nearly four months they landed at Fort York. The colonists were at once embarked in bateaux, and commenced the ascent of the Nelson River. Propelling their heavy-laden boats by rowing, often against a strong current, at the end of twenty days Lake Winnipeg was reached, and here new troubles awaited them. The season was advanced, the fall storms had set in, and their progress along the west shore of the lake, 260 miles in length, was slow and laborious. After a day's hard rowing, often against head-winds,

PETER RINDESBACHER.

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THE VOYAGEURS IN CAMP.

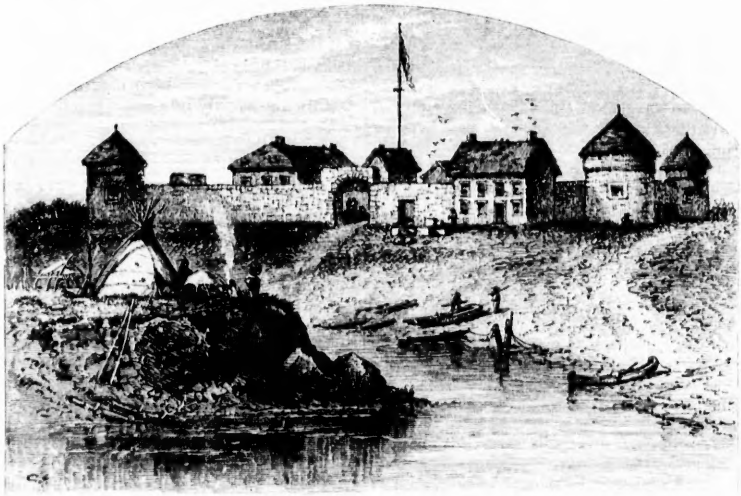
the little fleet of boats would put into some sheltered spot, where the weary voyageurs, perhaps drenched with rain or benumbed with cold, would kindle fires, and all be made as comfortable as possible for the night. In addition to these discouragements and discomforts, their supply of provisions gave out, and the few fish they were able to catch were barely sufficient to keep them from starving. At the end of three weeks, much time having been lost by reason of high winds and storms, they arrived, half famished, at the mouth of the Red River, where to their dismay they learned that the locusts or grasshoppers had passed through the country the summer before, literally destroying all the crops. With heavy hearts they proceeded up the river some thirty-five miles to Fort Douglas, situated on the west bank of the river, near the site of the present Fort Garry, then the principal trading post and head-quarters of the Hudson Bay Company. Governor Alexander McDowell and the other officers of the company, by their cordial welcome and earnest efforts to supply their wants and

make them comfortable, not only gladdened their hearts, but did much to make them forget the hardships of their long voyage.

It is worthy of note, in passing, that a few months before their arrival the Hudson Bay Company and the Northwest Company had settled their long-standing difficulties amicably, and merged their interests in a new corporation, retaining the name of the former company. Governor M'Dowell could not promise the colonists sufficient provisions to carry them through the approaching winter, for it was evident that the supplies received from England would be inadequate for the wants of all. After a full deliberation upon a question scarcely less momentous than that of life or death, it was resolved to send some seventy-five of the younger and more hardy of the colonists to Pembina, up the river, near the United States boundary, sixty miles distant, where it was believed the buffalo, elk, and deer were more abundant, and where jerked buffalo meat and pemmican could be obtained from the Indians of that locality. Just as the winter closed in, the party arrived at Pembina, and at once set about constructing huts and procuring fuel for the winter.

The succeeding winter was long and intensely cold, the thermometer often falling to forty-five degrees below zero, and the snow unusually deep. The colonists wintering at Pembina fared badly enough. With the advance of winter the scanty supply of provisions brought from Fort Douglas diminished rapidly, and, when exhausted, the fish, obtained with difficulty from the river through holes cut in the ice, with what buffalo meat could be bought from the Indians, was scarcely sufficient to prevent starvation. Sometimes an Indian dog was killed and eaten, and relished by most of them. The parties who occasionally ventured out with dogs and sledges obtained from the Indians to hunt for the buffalo, met with indifferent success, owing to the scarcity of the animals that winter, and lack of experience. Several of them were maimed for life by the freezing of their hands and feet. In the spring, after the snow had disappeared, the women would gather acorns and the seed-balls of the wild-rose bush that grew rank on the margin of the river, which, when cooked with a little buffalo fat, made nutritious if not palatable food, and served to relieve the hardship and monotony of the almost exclusively fish diet of the preceding winter.

Five years prior to the advent of the Swiss colony the employés of the Northwest Company, in their bitter opposition to Lord Selkirk's scheme to colonize that country with Europeans, openly resisted the settlers, and went so far as to make an armed attack on a settlement of Scotchmen near Fort Douglas, killing some twenty of them, including Governor Robert Semple, who had received his appointment as Governor of Hudson Bay Company five years previous. Lord Selkirk, on learning of the massacre, left England at once for Canada. There he obtained from the authorities a hundred or more soldiers from the "Régiment des Meurons," and a few volunteers.



FORT GARRY.

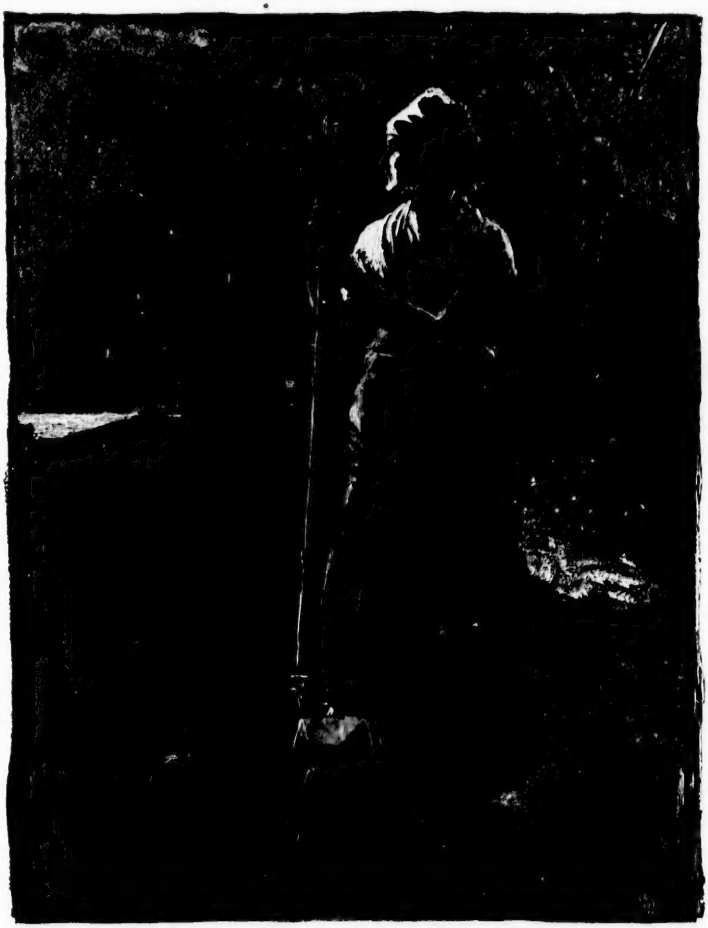
Placing himself at their head, he proceeded to the Red River Settlement, where, after seizing several of their trading posts, he restored peace and tranquillity. Two years after, the troops brought from Canada were discharged, and the greater part of them were induced by Lord Selkirk to settle in

ARMED ESCORT.

that country. Land was donated them near Fort Douglas, and cattle and other supplies furnished them on a long credit. Fortune favored these settlers, and at the time of the arrival of the Swiss colony they were generally well-to-do farmers; and had it not been for the ravages of the grasshoppers the summer before, the crops of these farmers would have furnished ample food for the new-comers during their first year's stay. These Canadian settlers, or "men-rons," as they were called, were all unmarried, except a few who had taken Indian or half-breed wives. Among the colonists were several families in which were marriageable daughters, and it was natural that offers of marriage should be made by the bachelor farmers. During the winter several such marriages were consummated. The colonists, although disappointed and almost starving, were nevertheless cheerful, and disposed to make the most of the unfortunate circumstances in which they found themselves. It was deemed necessary to celebrate the nuptials in a becoming manner, and to do honor to the occasion a party would be given, to which the relatives and friends were bidden. Wedding cake was made of coarse flour obtained from wheat ground in the ordinary rotary coffee-mill, to which were added a little buffalo fat and salt. There was also the music of the violin, and the feet of the dancers kept time to the airs of Switzerland.

The health of all the colonists that winter was good, despite the severity of the winter and the insufficiency of food. The opening of spring found them ready to enter on the lands allotted them at "La Fourche," at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, and soon after the 1st of May the entire colony was again united. Lord Selkirk had died at Pau, France, the autumn before their departure from Switzerland, but the fact had been withheld from them until after their arrival at Fort Douglas. Consequently no provision had been made to supply them with seeds and farming implements, as promised them before their departure from the Old World. They were therefore compelled, with few exceptions, to use the ordinary hoe and spade in turning over the sod and in preparing the soil for planting and sowing the seeds obtained in limited quantities from the Canadian farmers. However, as the result of a hard summer's work, the women assisting the men, and the soil being remarkably productive, the crops raised, with what they obtained from the older settlers, carried them through the succeeding winter comfortably.

Early in the fall of 1821 a herd of cattle, mostly cows, arrived from the State of Missouri, in charge of a party of armed drovers, and were distributed in the spring of 1822 among the Swiss settlers. This distribution of cattle, which had been contracted for by Lord Selkirk before his death, was all



ON GUARD.—[SEE PAGE 54.]

that had been done for the colonists in fulfillment of the pledges made them before their departure from Europe. As a consequence dissatisfaction became general, and a determination was made by a large part of the colonists to depart, the first practicable moment, for the United States—a country of which they had learned much since their arrival at the Red River. On the return of the drovers in the autumn of 1821, five families begged permission to accompany them, which was granted. In the month of November the party arrived in safety at Fort St. Anthony (subsequently Fort Snelling), situated at the junction of the Mississippi and St. Peter's rivers, then in process of construction, and garrisoned by United States troops in command of Colonel Josiah Snelling of the Fifth United States Infantry. With the consent of the commanding officer, the party of emigrants remained at the fort during the succeeding winter. The next spring they settled on the military reservation near the fort, cultivated land, and sold the products to the garrison.

In the spring of 1823 thirteen more of the colonists, with their families, decided to go to the United States, with the intention of settling in the State of Missouri, of which section of the Union they had heard glowing descriptions from the party of drovers two years before. They hired some half dozen carts—all that could be obtained in the settlement—to carry their ef-

feets to the head waters of the St. Peter's (now the Minnesota) River at Lake Traverse, some 200 miles above Fort St. Anthony by the course of the river. These carts were constructed without iron, the tires being of rawhide drawn tightly around the wheel. They are still known as the Red River cart, and until the opening of the North Pacific Railroad were frequently seen at St. Paul. The Sioux Indians found on their route after entering the United States were unfriendly, if not openly hostile, and the little company were often in considerable peril. By judicious management, however, understanding as they well did the character of the Indian, they escaped open conflict. The chiefs of the roving bands encountered were generally appeased, and their apparent good-will gained by presents of ammunition, food, and trinkets. Before the end of their journey, however, the Indians succeeded in stealing a part of their cooking utensils and provisions. The inadequate number of carts, heavily laden as they were with their effects, prevented any except the older children from riding, and often a mother would walk twenty miles in a day with a babe in her arms. The men were all armed, and acted as an escort to the train. After a long and at times perilous journey of 400 miles, they reached Lake Traverse, and went into camp, the carts returning with the men to whom they belonged. Preparations were at once begun to descend the St. Peter's River. Cottonwood-trees were felled, and canoes or "dug-outs" were made, one for every two adults of the party. The work was slow and difficult for the want of proper tools. Being in a country through which roamed hunting parties of unfriendly and thieving Indians, it was necessary to keep a guard over the camp at night. That duty devolved on the women, for the men needed the sleep of night in order to be able to work by day on the canoes. An old lady, now in her seventy-ninth year, and the only surviving member of the colony, who was twenty years of age or more at the time of the departure of the colony from Switzerland, told the writer not long since, with evident pride, that she had more than once stood guard over that little camp, armed with a gun, from nine o'clock at night until sunrise the next morning. The canoes having been finished, the party launched them, and heading them down the stream, floated with the current the greater part of the time. The river, as is usual at that season of the year, was low, and some portions of it filled with shoals and sand-bars, over which they were often compelled to drag their heavy-laden crafts.

About the middle of the month of September they arrived at Fort St. Anthony, and were kindly received by the officers of the garrison, and warmly welcomed by their countrymen who had preceded them two years before. After a few weeks' rest they prepared to descend the Mississippi River to St. Louis, their destination. Two small barges or keel boats which had been used to transport supplies from St. Louis for the use of the troops were generously placed at their disposal by Colonel Snelling (who also supplied them with provisions for the voyage), and in these they leisurely floated down the river, meeting with little or no difficulty. The exposure and hardships of the summer and early fall brought on chills and fevers and other malarial diseases. Mr. Monier, the senior of the party in age, fell sick and died, and was buried near Prairie du Chien, and soon after his eldest daughter followed him. Before reaching Rock Island, Mr. Chetlain became delirious with fever, and it was decided to leave him with his wife and child at Fort Armstrong, where he was placed in the post hospital, and cared for with kindness and skill. The rest proceeded on their way, reaching St. Louis late in the month of November. Mr. Chetlain and family joined them the next spring.

On the arrival of the emigrants at St. Louis, then a city of 6000 inhabitants, they were welcomed and hospitably treated by the Chouteaus, Soulards, and Gratiots (the latter of Franco-Swiss origin), and other French-speaking citizens, who had become familiar with their peculiar history. The greater part of the emigrants leased lands near the city and cultivated them. They proved industrious, temperate, and thrifty citizens. The climate of that region, however, was evidently unfavorable for them, and the larger part fell sick. The process of acclimatization was slow and difficult, and by the end of the second summer most of them decided to remove to a cooler and more healthful climate. The opening of the lead mines of the Northwest gave the wished-for opportunity. Mr. Chetlain and a few others, with their families, joined Colonel Henry Gratiot, the newly appointed agent for the Winnebago Indians, and took passage on the steamboat *Mexico*, one of the first boats that ascended the Mississippi above the mouth of the Illinois River, for La Pointe, on Fever River, where now stands the city of Galena, arriving there the 14th day of April, 1826. Some months later Messrs. Schirmer, Langet, and others followed. In the autumn of that year the greater part of them removed to the Indian agency at Gratiot's Grove, fifteen miles northeast from La Pointe, and engaged in mining and smelting lead ore and in farming.

The spring of 1826 was noted for the great rise of water in the Mississippi and its tributaries and in the Red and Assiniboine rivers, caused by the unusual deep snow of the preceding winter, which had melted with

warm and heavy rains. The Red and Assiniboine rivers rose so high that the lands at La Fourche were completely inundated, and the settlers compelled to seek safety by flight to higher ground several miles distant, taking with them their cattle and household effects. The losses sustained by the flood were very great, and no efforts were made to repair them. Nearly all the Swiss settlers remaining at La Fourche, including a part of the Canadian settlers, having become thoroughly discouraged, decided to leave at once for the United States. Abandoning their lands, and selling their cattle and farming implements for what they could, they hired carts to transport their effects and provisions, and started in a body for Fort St. Anthony, following the route taken by the first party, three years before, to Lake Traverse, and from thence by land to their destination, arriving there early in the autumn of that year. Governor McDowell and the other officers of the Hudson Bay Company deeply regretted their departure, and generously supplied them with provisions for the journey free of cost, an interpreter, and an armed escort of forty-five men. A few weeks after their arrival at Fort St. Anthony they were fortunate enough to find a small steamboat that had been used to transport supplies for the troops at that point, in which they took passage for the lead mines, to which place they decided to go after they had reached Fort St. Anthony. On their arrival at La Pointe they were warmly welcomed by their countrymen who had preceded them. Some of them settled at La Pointe, while the greater part went out to the agency at Gratiot's Grove, and engaged in mining and farming.

Six years later, when the Indian troubles began which culminated in a war known as the "Black Hawk war," and volunteers were called for, nearly all the men, without regard to age, enlisted, and having been accustomed to the use of fire-arms, rendered the country of their adoption valuable service.

The descendants of these colonists are numerous, and are found scattered throughout the Northwest, the greater part being in the region of the lead mines. Most of them are thrifty farmers and stock-breeders. A few have entered the professions and trade. All, as far as is known, are temperate, industrious, and law-abiding citizens.

URANIA.

From what superior star,
Gazing, entranced, afar,
Didst thou first look on earth when earth was young?
Thou whom the singers of all days have sung,
Spirit of Song! by many names adored,
Whose deep, sweet speech, the music of the soul,
Our human utterance can not yet control,
Upon whose dazzling shrine are ceaseless offerings poured.

When first thy sun-shod feet
Pressed the new verdure, sweet
With timid violet and virgin rose;
When first thy rainbow plumage passing by,
The shepherd bards discerned, ah! rapturously
They sought thy inspiration to disclose.
With burning heart and glances raised above,
Speech overflowed in song, and all their theme was love.

Nor didst thou linger long
In vales of pastoral song.
Judea's harp thy fervid fingers strung.
The groves of palm, the sacred rivers, heard,
The cedars upon Lebanon were stirred
When David's lips immortal measures sung.
And smoke of costliest odors rose to heaven
With chorus and response by Hebrew voices given.

On Orpheus' glowing lyre
Was laid thy touch of fire;
By thine own lips on Sappho's brow was pressed
The mystic kiss which woke her soul's unrest.
Unveiled by thee, in thy most radiant mood,
The palaces that on Olympus stood,
From whose charmed portals came, at thy decree,
The gods of earth and heaven, the nymphs of air and sea.

Then was the age of gold,
When bards heroic told
Heroic legends of primeval days.
Then had the singer his full meed of praise,
For thou didst touch the laurel with thy wand,
And prince and warrior with exultant hand
Wove the bright bays around the minstrel's name.
Their valor was his theme; his song their surest fame.

Yet not by these was seen
The splendor of thy mien,
The full, unclouded glory of thy face.
These caught but glimpses of the light divine,
And, counting thee among the "sacred nine,"
Groped in the darkness for thy dwelling-place.
Milton alone o'er elder bards prevailed;
Upon the starry heights he saw thy brow unveiled.

Dearer through ages grown,
Thou wilt not leave alone
The world thy presence has made half divine;
Still countless votaries bow before thy shrine.
The Norseman's ringing ballad, the soft chime
Of Spanish lute to silver sandaled rhyme,
The hymn of freedom by the sunset sea,
Or Persia's passion lays, all sacred are to thee.

Some are content to reach
The still, inaudible speech
Of winds and woods and waters' rhythmic flow.
These know thee best in nature's whispers low,
And with the hem of thy rich garment pressed
To tuneful lips, they are supremely blest.
Others have caught a more transcendent gleam,
And greet thee on the heights of prophecy and dream.

Stay, thou resplendent one!
Not yet thy task is done,
Not yet the perfect song of ages sung!
A rose unblown it sleeps upon thy breast,
Waiting to make some later Eden blest.
Still be the halo of thy beauty flung
Over dark days, dark years, until afar
Above the New Song's birth thou smilest like a star!